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1776 Spy Deed Remains Classified

It's no secret that the Central Intelligence Agency routinely engages in economic espionage around the world.

The CIA's economic spies are highly regarded, and sometimes give a president his first inkling about what is happening in the never-never land of dollars, yens and marks. It was from the CIA, for example, that President Carter first learned in 1978 that the United States had slipped from first to sixth place among the world's industrial nations.

This unique brand of espionage may be less romantic than the James Bond-style of spying, but it is no less important. It has become a major part of the CIA's operations since the derring-do days of World War II and the Cold War.

Indeed, economic espionage has been a function of American spies for more than 200 years. Yet such is the absurdity of the CIA's obsession with secrecy that the very first economic espionage mission on record—in 1776—is still apparently classified as secret by the spy agency.

The documents that detail this fledgling entry into international intelligence are contained in the CIA's Historical Intelligence Collection at Langley. Despite the fact that the information could hardly compromise U.S. espionage activities in 1980, the record of America's first venture into economic espionage is still classified as confidential.

The secret publication tells of the mission assigned to one William Car-

michael, who was sent to Holland late in 1776 in the guise of a merchant to gain information for the Committee of Secret Correspondence, the CIA's predecessor in the Continental Congress.

Carmichael's "control" was Silas Deane, a lawyer and businessman from Wethersfield, Conn., who was sent to France by Congress to obtain military supplies for the newly independent British colonies. Deane interpreted his mandate broadly enough to recruit Carmichael to do a little economic spying.

Deane "tasked Carmichael with a number of economic intelligence requirements," the CIA's secret history discloses. It then quotes agent Carmichael's report to the Committee of Secret Correspondence from Amsterdam on Nov. 2, 1776. It was sent through a secret mail drop on St. Eustatia Island, and told the Revolutionary CIA:

"You have been threatened that the Ukraine would supply Europe with tobacco . . . I have seen some of its tobacco here, and the best of it is worse than the worst of our ground leaf."

Why this material is still secret is anyone's guess. It seems unlikely that the 204-year-old mail drop on St. Eustatia is in danger of being compromised . . . or that the quality of Ukrainian tobacco is a secret that must still be protected.

Moscow on Muskie: Cyrus Vance's departure from Foggy Bottom hasn't caused Kremlin Washington-watchers

to lose any sleep, according to U.S. intelligence experts.

While American pundits have speculated that Edmund Muskie will have more clout at the White House than national security affairs adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Russians are under no such illusions. They still see the Polish-born Brzezinski as the man who has the decisive influence over Carter's foreign policy.

Soviet intelligence analysts consider Muskie's appointment as strictly a political move intended to help the president's reelection campaign. Unless he stays on past the November election, the Politburo pols will continue to assume that Brzezinski is the one to watch.